THE CAYAPA INDIANS*

by
Max Heimann

In the far north west of the Ecuadorian Republic there is a river named the Santiago. Near the village of Borbon it is joined by one of its tributaries, the Cayapa River. The Cayapa Indians, a harmless tribe consisting of no more than 2500 persons, live on the upper reaches of the Cayapa River and around its sources.

I have never been able to understand why they are called "uncivilized" and "savage." Would it be because they dress more simply, more comfortably, more suitably and cheaply than we European fashion slaves? Or would it be because they speak their own language, unknown to us, and because they do not know how to read and write and do not stuff their heads with the dead weight taught in schools and called "education"? Or even, would it be because they have other customs and manners as well as different moral concepts?

One thing is certain—the Cayapa are happy people, because they are more satisfied with their lot than we Europeans, who are so demanding and feel so superior with our conceit in our sham civilization, in the clothes prescribed for us by the tyrants of "fashion" and in the "wisdom" acquired in schools.

They frequently come to town in small groups of five to 20 persons. I have seen them many hundreds of times, but again and again I am delighted when I meet these small, but well-built and sturdy [282] figures. The men are not taller than 150-160 cm. (Translator--5 ft. to 5ft. 4 in.), while the women are barely 140 cm. (Translator--4 ft. 8 in.). Their skin is copper brown in color.

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* The author a business man, lived in Tumaco (southwest Colombia) for 35 years (1895-1930) and was German Vice-Consul for the Departamento Nariño from 1907 to 1920. Although he never actually visited Cayapa villages, he did have occasions to see and question groups of them "many hundreds of times," on their frequent visits to Tumaco. Apart from this, several of his employees have been in Cayapa villages and have given him reports. (K. Th. Preuss).

505 might hear a piano or phonograph music from somewhere. That they still must quickly take a look at. The entire crowd rushes busily into the house concerned and up the stairs. Their curiosity is soon satisfied and they come down again and now they must be off quickly so as to be able to make use of the tide current. Their
501 unpainted canoes are 8 to 10 meters (Translator--about 8 to 10 yds.) in length and from 70 to 90 centimeters (Translator--2 1/3 to 3 ft.) in width. They are slim and pleasing in shape and have
[531] black colored decorations around the edges. Each one of them accommodates from 5 to 8 persons, close together, with their meager belongings. They paddle along nimbly with their leaf-shaped oars and, while their canoes glide along silently and swiftly, the entire crowd has soon disappeared in the mouth of the
484 Mira River. It will take them two days to reach their hometowns.
648 During the journey they camp in the open over night, somewhere along the shore, in an empty pasture. But they have to be careful. Occasionally they are attacked and robbed there by Negroes, and if they resist, they are murdered in cold blood. Only recently a whole group of them, men, women and children, 14 persons altogether, were most cruelly murdered on the Mira River by some bestial Negroes.

101 [285] However, our friends will now have arrived home safe
342 and sound on the upper Cayapa River. They are greeted from afar
361 by the friendly smoke of their own hearths. Their villages con-
824 sist of a few, widely dispersed bamboo huts of a most primitive type. A few uncut tree trunks have simply been rammed into the earth in a rectangle. The floor is at a height of 3 to 4 meters (Translator--ca. 3 to 4 yds.) and is made of split bamboo. Above this, at an equal distance, is the roof made of coconut (?) palm (Steinnusspalme) leaves. That is the entire structure. Since these houses have no walls, it is obivous that doors and windows are not
417 required either. The trunk of the Ceiba trees, light as a cork,
824 *into which a few steps are hewn, serves as stairs.* (*The Ceiba tree*
512 produces the silk-like balsa wool, called "Kapok" on the European market.) These stairs are obliquely leaned on, without being fastened anywhere. A hen-roost can be climbed more easily than one of these Cayapa ladders. In order to be somewhat safe from surprises by unwanted visitors, the ladders are drawn up to the living quarters overnight, and when a family goes on a trip, the ladder is thrown into the river and left to float away. After
322 all it is so simple and easy to fetch another Ceiba trunk from the nearby forest on returning and quickly hack a few step-like cuts into it with a chopping knife.

2: Murra E-4 (no date) 1943 SD6 Cayapa SD6

ECONOMICS

The *Cayapa* economic unit is the virtually self-sufficient, one-family household. Land is owned and worked familially, and there is as much land to be had as the family can clear. If any special rules govern distribution and inheritance, they are not reported by our sources. Also, there seem to be very few provisions for interhousehold cooperation: men will help a neighbor bring down a tree trunk from the hills, but all other activities are evidently left to individual enterprise.

This self-sufficiency does not apply to all spheres of activity. Machetes and rifles are essential in jungle life, and most families make at least one trip a year to the coast for trading and social purposes. In the small Ecuadorean and Colombian towns they find a ready market for rubber, tagua nuts, and other forest products. Cocoa is grown specifically for this trade. There is also a limited market for some of their manufactures: canoes, mats, fans, and other basketry. In exchange, the *Cayapa* want metal goods: axes, machetes, shotguns, fishhooks, fish spears, and copper tubing for their distilleries. But they also like beads and mirrors, pearls, vests, and old derby hats. In recent years machine-made muslins and calicoes have been edging out native-made cloth.

The *Cayapa* are not yet incorporated in Ecuadorean economy. Their need for metal goods and trinkets has not yet forced them to work on plantations or in placer gold mines. Their own supply of rum has helped them avoid debts contracted for alcohol, and they have usually retreated into the forest when their self-sufficiency has been menaced. It is improbable that this selective acculturation can last very long.

SOCIAL AND POLITICAL ORGANIZATION

The basic *Cayapa* social unit is the household. Though there is no definite indication as to size and composition, it appears to be an extended family including normally no more than 10 to 12 people. Chief Antonio Napa's house at Punta Venado could seat some 40-odd people at a feast [422] but it was unique in size, and the Napa household according to Bassoco (1894) had only 8 to 10 members.

Barrett (1925) presents a detailed chart of kinship terms used by the *Cayapa*. We unfortunately know nothing about the behavior that goes with the terms or about marriage rules. On the face of it the system is a "lineal" one—collateral relatives are separated from lineal ones but are not differentiated among themselves. Thus, the term for uncle applies to both paternal and maternal ones. All terms are highly descriptive. There is no evidence of reciprocal use of terms, but Barrett's chart is not really complete. The system is quite unique and interesting.

The lineal and descriptive nature of the kinship system emphasizes the bilateral character of the *Cayapa* family. There is no clan organization. The extended family household is the truly basic social unit. There is

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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THE CAYAPA INDIANS OF ECUADOR

By S. A. Barrett

TERRITORY

Geographical Situation

THE people known as the Cayapa Indians live at present almost wholly on the main and tributary streams of the Rio Cayapas, one of the large rivers of the northwestern part of the Province of Esmeraldas, Ecuador, and about ninety miles in a direct line north of the equator. Their territory is within comparatively easy reach of the ocean, which almost all visit at least once a year.

There are a few, perhaps an aggregate of one hundred individuals, who live in several other localities, namely, on the adjacent Rio Santiago, at Pueblo Viejo, and at points along the immediate coast from the Rio Dabele, a few miles south of the town of Esmeraldas, the capital of the province, northward to the Rio Rosario, about eight miles southeast of Tumaco, in the extreme southwestern part of Colombia. However, practically all the Cayapa, approximating fifteen hundred to two thousand individuals, now live on or in the immediate vicinity of the river which bears their name.

The Rio Cayapas heads in the western slope of the coast range of the Andes at a point not far from Mt Cotacachi, which attains an altitude of 16,290 feet (4,966 meters). The western slope of this sierra is

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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CA 101 197

close linguistic affinity with the Cayapa were the Colorados.

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The dialect of the Colorados, however, is so different from that of the Cayapa as to be almost unintelligible to the latter. Their customs, dress, and general culture are also quite distinct, and their territory is of a very different character from that of the Cayapa, being decidedly mountainous, though not far enough inland to be at a great altitude. There is no political or social affinity between the two peoples; in fact, although belonging to the same linguistic stock, the only knowledge one has of the other is that gained from an occasional visit by two or three Cayapa to the Colorado country, or vice versa. It is told as one of the important events of recent times that in returning, several years ago, from a visit to Quito, the chief of the Punta Venado division of the Cayapa came by way of the Colorado country and spent several days there, and that he finally brought home with him a member of that tribe who visited on the Rio Cayapas for some days before returning to his own people.

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That the Cayapa have wider linguistic affiliations has been recently shown by Drs Beuchat and Rivet,[12] who set forth the fact that there is considerable affinity between the Barbacoas, of which the Cayapa is a dialect, and the Coconuco and Paniquita groups, both of which are in Colombia. The interrelations of the latter two

[12] Affinités des Langues du Sud de la Colombie et du Nord de l'Équateur (Groupes Paniquita, Coconuco et Barbacoa), par H. Beuchat et P. Rivet, extrait du *Muséon*, Louvain, 1910.

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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Cholo

197 groups are much closer than are those of either with the Barbacoa, but there seem to be a sufficient number of features in common between these two Colombian stocks on the one hand, and the Cayapa and Colorado dialects on the other, to warrant the inclusion of all these in a larger group or linguistic family.

101 On the north the nearest Indian neighbors of the Cayapa are those commonly called by the ambiguous term "Cholos," and who live along the Rio Saija, a small stream which empties into the ocean at about 2° 50′ N., at a point nearly opposite the island of Gorgona. These people are entirely different from the Cayapa in language and culture; but there is a certain amount of intermingling between the two, and a marked [177] influence is exerted by the Cholos on some features of Cayapa culture, especially medicine practices.

The only other Indian neighbors of the Cayapa are the Quichua, or Kechua, descendants of the historic Inca peoples, who live in the interior valleys, the nearest [484] being those about Ibarra and Cotacachi. Although they are of an entirely different linguistic stock, there is here also a certain amount of intermingling, small parties of Quichua making occasional trips down to the coast, and small parties of Cayapa making occasional [487] trips into the mountains. At the present time, however, the trails are much neglected and are extremely difficult to travel, so that the intercourse is very slight.

177 The only other peoples with whom the Cayapa come into contact are the few European or North American whites, and the many negroes, descendants of former

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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462 The women do all the spinning and weaving of cloth,
512 but the men sew all garments, not only for themselves
294 but also for the small boys who have not yet learned to
[291] sew. This is due largely no doubt to the fact that the single garment worn by the women requires no sewing whatever, while the two garments worn by the men must be sewn.

868 At a very early age boys begin to learn the arts practised by their elders, hence they are instructed in hunting, fishing, woodworking, and similar useful accomplishments of the men.

512 It is customary among the Cayapa to arise at dawn, usually between five and five-thirty o'clock, and to retire as soon as darkness comes, or between six-thirty and seven o'clock. These hours vary little throughout the year, owing to the proximity of the equator.

[527] The daily routine is usually about the same throughout the year, varying in event of a fiesta, or boda, which brings the people together at a particular village, from which, after some days of festivities, they return home.

•[484] Another diversion is going down the river to the settlements. Sometimes this trip is made almost purely for
[439] pleasure and to obtain oysters and other sea foods, but more often these pleasure trips are combined with the selling of tagua, cacao, rubber, or plantains, and occasionally logs for lumber.

593 One of the most characteristic features of the daily life of the Cayapa is the devotion of the members of a family toward one another, especially that of parents toward their children. Few restrictions are placed

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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old mountain home at Pueblo Viejo and wiped their enemies out of existence. 721

In the only instance of war which the Cayapa describe fully, it appears that they organized themselves into war-parties and systematically invaded the enemy's territory. Predatory raiding was never practised by them, perhaps on account of their isolated position as well as by reason of their non-militant character. 721 726

The lance was the chief weapon used in war, though the bow and arrow seem to have been used to a slight extent in more recent times. The blow-gun with its poisoned dart was also used in war to some extent. It is claimed that the pre-Cayapa inhabitants of this region used throwing-stones with good effect. The sling, however, appears to have been unknown, the stones being simply thrown with the hand. 411 726

MANUFACTURES

Canoe-making and Canoeing

The rivers of the Cayapa region provide practically the only means of travel until the limit of navigation by canoe is reached. In fact, the streams provide *almost the only means of travel* at all, owing to the density of the jungle and to the fact that practically all of the Cayapa live along the rivers below the limit of navigation. The few trails through the higher mountains are almost never used except when journeys to the interior are made. On the other hand, there are various short trails extending back into the hills 484 487

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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along these rivers—these are used for hunting or for short trips from the rivers. All the permanent habitations are situated along the banks of the rivers, and to pass from one to another of these, as well as for making trips of greater length, the dug-out canoe, called kā'le, is used. In fact, the canoe is one of the most prominent features of Cayapa life. Everyone begins in early childhood the training which makes him an expert canoeman, and is perfectly at home in a dug-out, whether it be along the smooth sluggish waters of the lower course of the river, in the rapids of the upper course, or out on the ocean coasting to some nearby point.

From the important place the canoe holds in the life of the people, it is natural that much care should be given to its construction and that the art of canoe-making should have reached a high state of perfection. Of the many species of trees in the jungle, only a few produce woods which are hard and tough enough to be suitable for canoe-making. These qualities are found in certain species which have what may be called a criss-cross grain, that is, an interlacing of the wood fiber which makes splitting almost impossible. Though a considerable degree of hardness is required, too great hardness is not desirable. Certain woods, therefore, such as the guayacan, are too hard and heavy to be suitable.

Having found a tree of the desired kind, it is felled with an ax and the canoe is roughly fashioned from a portion of its trunk, as is shown in pl. xxx, and finally this section is cut loose from the remainder of the tree.

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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the long paddles, and the woman sitting forward is paddling with one of them. From these illustrations may also be gained a good idea of the custom of loading a canoe. While in some regions the Indians and also others using canoes endeavor to place the load fairly well aft in order that the prow will point considerably upward, the Cayapa aim so to load their canoes that the ends will practically balance and the canoe will ride as nearly as possible level in the water. They claim that their canoes ride more easily and swiftly when laden in this manner, and also that if it is necessary to load the canoe in such manner that it is not well balanced, it is better to place the cargo forward rather than aft, since if the stern is too low in the water it impedes progress.

As above mentioned when speaking in general of the sizes and uses of canoes, the one used on long journeys and with a carrying capacity of several people is necessarily of considerable length, while on the other hand the man's special fishing canoe is often not more than ten feet in length and frequently does not exceed twelve or fifteen inches in width. All the canoes shown in [illegible] are of the large type, or what may be termed family canoes, which range from eighteen to thirty-five feet in length.

Some families go very rarely down to the coast; indeed on the extreme upper waters of the Rio Cayapas and the Rio San Miguel there are a few individuals past middle age who, it is said, have never seen the ocean. Most families, however, go at least once a year, while

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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Most families, however, go at least once a year, while
505 those living on the main Rio Cayapas and its tributaries
484 to the limit of tidewater, which is just above the con-
[439] fluence of the Rio Camarones with the main river, usually go down to the coast several times a year, each time taking with them a load of various commodities such as plantains, tagua, rubber, and cacao, for sale. For such a journey from two to several days are required, and each member of the family must take along his mosquito canopy, his strip of bark cloth which serves as a bed, and other necessary personal articles, while the party must be provided by the women with cooking utensils and food for the journey. Each member is usually bedecked in his best clothing and necklaces, and it is customary also to paint elaborately the exposed parts of the body, as is done on the occasion of a fiesta.

For the protection of the small children, a mat, such as that shown in pl. CVI, 2, is placed with its two ends just inside the gunwales of the canoe so that it bows up in the form of a canopy. Such a protection is shown in pl. LXXX. The cargo of the canoe is always protected from rain with hoja-blanca leaves, or now and then with large plantain or banana leaves. In the Cayapa country, where it rains practically every day, a downpour never hinders one from making a journey. An ordinary rain is met without protection, but if it is very severe one may be well sheltered by holding up a large plantain or banana leaf on the windward side.

505 It is unnecessary to provide a camping outfit in this
484 region, since hospitality is a custom of the country;
574 consequently in making a journey it is necessary only

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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to reach some house for the night. It is immaterial whether the resident is an old acquaintance or a perfect stranger, for the traveler is assured of a welcome.

Under ordinary conditions a journey down-stream with the current is easier and more rapid than one up-stream. However, the effect of the tide retards down-stream travel to some extent, but this is compensated by the aid which it gives while one journeys up-stream. It is in all cases customary to travel with the tide, either up or down stream. When going with the current the middle of the stream is taken, as shown in pl. LXXIX, where a canoe is illustrated going down-stream in the middle of the river; but when necessary to travel against the current, the side of the stream is taken. In the illustration mentioned is shown a second canoe making its way along near the bank and against the current.

For ordinary propelling under all such circumstances the paddle is exclusively used, though a man's paddle with its long handle may be temporarily converted into a pole when shallow water is reached. When a strong current is encountered, as is the case along the upper courses of the streams or when going against a flood, regular poles, such as those already described, are needed to propel the canoe. Every person in the canoe, including the children, carries his own paddle and is expected to use it almost constantly throughout the journey. Ordinarily in the large canoes not more than two poles are carried, and for a moderate current the pole would be used only by the man in the extreme prow, who frequently stands out on its flat surface as shown in

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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any other articles of value he does not deem it safe to leave at home.

These hampers, especially when used in traveling, are tied about the middle with a cord or a woven band, and can be tumbled about without danger to their contents. They are frequently kept filled with articles in storage in the loft of the house, and often are suspended by the above-mentioned cord or band from the rafters or from one of the timbers at the eaves. Sometimes these baskets are made for special purposes. This is the case with the long one shown in pl. XCIII, 2, which was made especially for the storage of spindles, though the usual spindle storage-basket is a long tubular one like those shown in figs. 8 and 12 of the same plate. Another special form is the very small hamper-shape basket, such as those shown in figs. 15–17; these are used as receptacles for trinkets.

The bottle-shape bait basket, tū'ñūtcītci (pl. XCIII, 3), is a very specialized form and, as its name implies, is made for the particular purpose of carrying live insect bait in the canoe while fishing. Its narrow neck is provided with a balsa stopper or with some leaves made into a bundle which serves the same purpose. [227]

Tubular baskets, called tcūrūkū'kū (pl. XCIII, 8, 12), are made especially for the storage of spindles, either full or empty. These baskets are usually from thirty to forty centimeters in length by from seven to fifteen centimeters in diameter. Such a basket is hung by one edge of its opening, so that it hangs at more or less of a slant. It is usually suspended from a rafter or other part of the house-frame near the eaves, within easy

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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turned with proper ceremony to the church, and the ceremonies of the fiesta proper were ended.

The night was spent in dancing, although this was not an essential part of the ceremony. By evening of the following day (Monday) all the fiesteros had started toward their homes, and some even left the village during the afternoon of Sunday.

This fiesta is the most important of all the gatherings of the Cayapa and is one which almost all attend even though they may be so situated that the journey to their particular village is a difficult one, and may never attend the other gatherings of the year. Even those Cayapa who live on the Rio Verde and at other distant points endeavor to return to their old home village to celebrate this particular ceremony.

La Fiesta de Noche Buena

"La fiesta de Noche Buena," or the Christmas festival, is the less important of the two strictly religious ceremonies of the Cayapa, and, while the services are held by the sindico, or guardian of the church, and by others, these are not so elaborate as are those held at Semana Santa just described, and less interest is displayed. All these services and indeed the entire conduct of the fiesta are almost identical with those of Semana Santa, except that various of the ceremonies and processions, especially those concerned with enacting the resurrection of Christ, are absent, as is also the ceremonial drinking by the images of saints. There is much dancing both day and night, and there are frequent feasts, some being

[i.e., Easter. --- Analyst]

3: Barrett E-5 (1908-1909)1925
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An interesting example of the possible differences in skin color is shown, however, when any of the Indians journey to the coast, and especially if they voyage a considerable distance at sea, which they frequently do when some of them have occasion to visit Tumaco or Esmeraldas. On such occasions they take their canoes out to sea and paddle, skirting the shore-line for a considerable number of miles. The trip from Limones to Esmeraldas necessitates a journey of about fifty miles on the open sea, and ordinarily requires at least a week. For such trips the Cayapa usually dress specially, in that they put on extra necklaces, neckbands, and wristbands, and otherwise ornament themselves for the occasion. Their tight-fitting neckbands and wristbands are never taken off while they are away from home, consequently the portions of the skin covered by them are protected from the influence of the elements. When they return home, however, this finery is usually taken off. The contrast between the covered portions of skin and the exposed parts is striking, even though the intervals of sunshine along the coast are practically as infrequent as along the river. The sea breeze has a marked tanning effect, consequently the traveler returns home almost as brown as many of our North American Indians who are subjected to sun and wind during much of the year. The covered portions of the skin, however, remain the same color as when the Cayapa leaves home, and it is therefore possible to contrast the natural color with the tan. No color charts were available for purposes of comparison and exact record, but the differences between these two tints are considerable and show the natural color of the Cayapa, as previously mentioned, to be

of the population of the Río Cayapas up to Sapallo Grande was Negro. Isolated Negro enclaves are found today as far up as San Miguel. Negroes tend to live in village settlements, some of which are of political and/or economic importance, while the Cayapa live scattered along the river banks. The town of San José, which lies a few miles below the Río Cameronas, is the administrative center for the area. San Antonio, which is located a few miles above Punta Venado, is of considerable commercial importance as it is readily accessible to the small coastal vessels engaged in the banana trade.

The most characteristic feature of the area is its riverine quality, and settlement and movement centers on the rivers for both Indians and Negroes. The large, hilly land areas between the rivers are completely uninhabited, and the dense jungle growth makes foot travel exceedingly difficult. Except for short hunting trips or to secure trees for the making of canoes, the jungle or monte is avoided. The river, on the other hand, is open and free. The river scene is seldom a quiet one. People going down stream maneuver their canoes into mid-channel, taking full advantage

all lined up single file broadside to the altar. There were two bridal couples and the two sets of godparents, each couple clutching a lighted candle. The priest, an Italian, who had just arrived from missionary service in the Congo, told them that candles were not at all needed for the marriage service. The members of the wedding party looked somewhat discomfited, but they maintained their gripe on the candles. The priest repeated his admonitions several times. There was no argument, but the Indians just stood there holding their candles in front of them. Finally, the priest, with a generous Italian shrug, said, "If you want to get married with candles, I'll marry you with candles, but you really don't need them." In a small way, Catholic flexibility had met Cayapa rigidity and the priest was beginning his accommodation.

Easter is the most important holiday for the Cayapa. The day before Easter week, people begin arriving at the ceremonial center and set up housekeeping. The following day, most of the people have arrived. There were no special services, and most of the day was spent in clearing the plaza. The /ʔinᵊl/ began the work of

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diet now, but the leaves are in demand for roofing material. Another cash crop is hardwood trees, but they are not often planted; enterprising individuals cut them out of the unclaimed forest.

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Land is seldom held in one large block. It is usually scattered about among other holdings so that, quite often, choice properties are separated by distances involving several day's travel. Many Cayapa have two houses, each built as close as possible to their main holdings. Inevitably, they must spend considerable time away from large sections of their property and, as a result, Negroes often illegally harvest standing crops or, perhaps, plant their own. Negroes may buy land from the Cayapa, but as the banana economy continues to boom, the Indians are more and more reluctant to sell. Sometimes usufruct is rented by the Negro, usually for a share of the profits, but arguments invariably develop. It is said that the Indian is always at a disadvantage in his dealings with the Negro because of the latter's readiness to engage in witchcraft and "spoil" the land for the Indian owner. If several members of an Indian's family sicken or die, after a recent quarrel with a Negro about land, it is assumed that witchcraft has been

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